

Parashat Va'era 5776, 2016

In Order That The World Should Know

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains five *pasukim* (verses) that incorporate a variation of the phrase, “in order that you know:”

So said the L-rd, “With this you will know (*b'zot taida*) that I am the L-rd.” Behold, I will smite with the staff that is in my hand upon the water that is in the Nile, and it will turn to blood. (7:17)

“... in order that you should know (*l'ma'an taida*) that there is none like the L-rd, our G-d.” (8:6)

And I will separate on that day the land of Goshen, upon which My people stand, that there will be no mixture of noxious creatures there, in order that you know (*l'ma'an taida*) that I am the L-rd in the midst of the earth. (8:18)

Because this time, I am sending all My plagues into your heart and into your servants and into your people, in order that you know (*ba'avur taida*) that there is none like Me in the entire earth. (9:14)

... When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to the L-rd. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, in order that you know (*l'ma'an taida*) that the land is the L-rd's. (9:29, all quotes from *Sefer Shemot*, Parashat Va'era, these and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own)

These *pasukim* (verses) refer to the plagues of blood, frogs, wild beasts and hail that the Almighty unleashed against Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Moreover, the content of what is to be known, and the message that Moshe delivered to Pharaoh, are quite parallel: the existence and uniqueness of G-d is the subject of the first four verses, and the concept of G-d's absolute sovereignty over the earth is found in the final verse.

At this point, we might well ask, “Why did the Torah place such singular emphasis upon the phrase ‘in order that you know’?” The Torah is almost always succinct in its use of language, even when the subject at hand is of far-reaching import. One of the great Sephardic Torah commentators, Rabbi Don Yitzhak Abarbanel *zatzal* (1437-1508), provided a solution to this question in his elucidation of the famous *Brit Bein Habetarim* (Covenant of the Pieces, *Sefer Bereishit* 15:7). Moreover, in the course of his exposition, he presented an overarching rationale as to why our ancestors were exiled to the Land of Egypt.

The Abarbanel began his explication by noting that the 13th century BCE was a time in which the vast majority of the world embraced the stars as gods and denied the existence (*metziut*) of the Almighty. Moreover, even those people who recognized G-d’s existence denied His Divine providence (*hashgachato*). A third group, who recognized G-d’s reality, denied His omnipotence and ability to effectuate change in the world (*yacholato*). The Abarbanel maintained that the Jewish people served as the means whereby each of these false doctrines could be expunged from the collective consciousness of mankind:

In order that the truth of these principles of belief [i.e. *metziuto*, *hashgachato*, *yacholato*] should become known in the world, the Holy One saw fit to bring His chosen people into the exile of Egypt – to be in the land that was totally absorbed with every manner and variety of false and twisted beliefs. [Moreover,] it was filled with witchcraft and machinations [against the Almighty] – more so than any other land.

Next, the Abarbanel conceptualized Moshe’s role in the Divine drama as one dedicated to teaching the world accurate perceptions regarding *emunah b’Hashem* (belief in G-d):

And the Holy One blessed be He, through the agency of His prophet [Moshe], warned [Pharaoh] “Send forth My people so that they will serve Me” – the Egyptians, [however,] did not listen to His voice, and consequently, He multiplied wonders and signs in their midst. It was through this [i.e. the wonders and signs] that the truth of the fundamental principles of faith, namely, *metziuto*, *hashgachato*, *yacholato* were made manifest in the world.

At this juncture, the Abarbanel focused squarely upon the repetition of our initial phrase, “in order that you know,” and its variants:

Therefore, we find regarding the *Makkot* (Plagues) in Egypt that it initially states, “With this you will know (*b'zot taida*) that I am the L-rd.” [This was in order to teach] the principle of G-d's existence (*metziuto*). Afterwards the Torah says, “... in order that you know (*l'ma'an taida*) that I am the L-rd in the midst of the earth, [this was in order to teach] the principle of G-d's Divine providence (*hashgachato*). Following these first two instances, the Torah states, “... in order that you know (*ba'avur taida*) that there is none like Me in the entire earth.” [This was in order to teach] the principle of G-d's omnipotence (*yacholato*). (Translation, brackets and parentheses my own)

Based upon the Abarbanel's incisive analysis, we now have a working hypothesis as to the role of *Galut Mitzraim* (the Egyptian Exile) in human history. It is crucial to remember that Egypt was the most technologically sophisticated and powerful nation of its time. As such, it ruled over much of the known world. Therefore, our forebears were chosen to be the vehicle whereby the truth of the Master of the Universe's existence, Divine providence and omnipotence could be recognized and accepted by all mankind. Though we must never minimize the anguish and unrelenting pain of the 210 years of servitude that our ancestors endured in Egypt, it is vital to note the unprecedented role the Jewish nation played in teaching the world, “*Ein ke-lokein, Ein ka-doneinu, Ein k'Malkein Ein k'Moshieinu*” (“There is none like our G-d, There is none like our L-rd, There is none like our King, There is none like our Savior.”) Therefore, at the very dawn of our deliverance and nationhood, we were *zocheh* (merited) to be the Almighty's “light unto nations” in order that the world would know that His dominion and salvation extend “until the end of the earth.” (Based upon *Sefer Yeshayahu* 49:6)

With the Almighty's help and never-ending kindness, may we continue to be His emissaries and “light” unto the entire world. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom,

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.